

## **MONITORING GROWTH TARGETS IN URBAN VILLAGES AND URBAN CENTERS**

### **Summary**

Pursuant to Policy L61 of the Comprehensive Plan, the City will monitor growth in urban centers and villages. SPO has proposed thresholds for population and employment growth that measure five-year totals and would identify fast-growing and slow-growing urban centers and villages. Approaching or exceeding the thresholds would trigger a special review by SPO in cooperation with neighborhood representatives. The special review of growth in affected neighborhoods would provide a framework of information that SPO and citizens can use to determine courses of action to address identified issues and offset impacts.

### **Background**

One goal of the state Growth Management Act is to direct future urban growth into existing urban areas in order to minimize the consumption of undeveloped land and to make efficient use of existing facilities and utilities. Part of the City's responsibility under GMA is to demonstrate that it has both the capacity and a strategy for accommodating a certain level of population growth over the 20-year life of the Plan. The level of population growth was decided for all of the individual jurisdictions in King County in terms of households. For Seattle, the total household target is 50,000 to 60,000. Building on the urban village strategy, the City assigned targets to urban centers and planning estimates to preliminary urban villages, based on their zoning capacity at the time the Plan was adopted and on the role they were expected to play in the growth management strategy.

For the urban centers, the household growth targets ranged from 1,300 to 14,700 households over the 20-year period. Planning estimates for the urban villages ranged from 200 to 1,700 households over the same period. In addition, the urban centers and hub urban villages have targets or planning estimates for employment.

The Comprehensive Plan established household and employment growth targets for the City's five urban centers and employment targets for the two manufacturing/industrial centers. The plan also provided planning estimates for household growth in the residential urban villages and for household and employment growth in the hub urban villages. Once a neighborhood plan is adopted and the village boundaries within that neighborhood are adopted, growth targets will also be established for the village.

Some neighborhood planning groups have raised questions about the effect of growth targets, particularly what options the neighborhoods have -- or what the City would do -- if villages seem to be exceeding or falling short of their targets.

Policy L61 in the Plan directs the City to monitor growth in centers and villages and to establish threshold criteria that will help determine whether growth is occurring too fast or too slow, relative to the targets. It further directs that the City develop a procedure for addressing the rate of growth in those villages identified by the threshold criteria.

SPO conducted a meeting on December 10, 1998 with a group of interested citizens to discuss and accept comments on the proposed thresholds and monitoring system described in this paper. Several helpful comments and concepts were offered that will influence the monitoring process. These comments are summarized later in this issue paper.

### **Recommended Thresholds and Monitoring**

The City proposes measuring household and employment growth within centers and villages and using the following thresholds to identify where growth is deviating too much from the targets:

- villages/centers that achieve 50% or more of their 20-year target within a five-year period;
- villages/centers that increase their household or employment totals by 25% or more within a five-year period, or;
- villages/centers that achieve less than 10% of their household or employment target within a five year period.

The first two thresholds identify fast-growing villages/centers and the third threshold identifies slow-growing villages/centers. If data reveal that certain villages/centers closely approach but do not meet the threshold criteria, SPO will have the discretion to include them in the fast- or slow-growing categories. This paper does not propose any rules for such cases, but the intent is to provide for flexible judgment rather than strict adherence to a quantitative formula.

The reason for measuring growth over a five-year period is to ensure that individual projects, or brief swings in the economic cycle, do not inappropriately identify concern about growth rates in a particular area. The City's Strategic Planning Office (SPO) will be responsible for monitoring the amount of household growth (derived from construction of new dwelling units) and employment growth by village and center. Interested citizens may collaborate with SPO in tracking and verifying growth. SPO anticipates that data will be gathered periodically to track growth for each village and center, and that monitoring reports will be produced every two years commencing in 1999, five years after adoption of the July 1994 Comprehensive Plan.

As an example of how many villages might be identified by these criteria, SPO extrapolated the rate of residential development activity between 1994 and 1997 over a 5-year period to estimate how much residential growth could occur in the villages, if the preliminary boundaries were maintained and if the past three years' level of development were to continue through 1999. With those assumptions, five villages are projected to

exceed the fast-growth criteria: the Commercial Core, Aurora/130th, Eastlake, Rainier Beach and Wallingford villages. All of these villages except Aurora/130th were projected to exceed 50 percent of their household growth target within five years. Aurora/130th was projected to add approximately 25 percent to its household base during the five-year period.

Eighteen villages/centers (Downtown Urban Center, International District, Pioneer Square, Denny Triangle, South Lake Union, First Hill, West Seattle Junction, Admiral, Ballard, Fremont, Greenwood, University Village, Rainier/I-90, Columbia City, Crown Hill, MLK/Holly, Roosevelt, South Park) are projected to produce less than 10% of their household targets over a five-year period. Of course, it cannot be known for certain whether these villages will be the ones eventually identified once all permit data are available.

The large number of villages meeting the slow-growth threshold may be too many for SPO to effectively study in-depth, and the potential for five or more villages meeting fast-growth thresholds is also a concern in this regard. It may be necessary for SPO to prioritize its efforts among villages that meet the thresholds. A natural prioritization method would be to rank the villages according to percent growth toward their targets, percent growth over the base population (or households), gross amount of growth and/or other criteria. In this way, the most severe conditions can be identified and addressed. It is also possible that if a large amount of slow-growing villages are identified, a more abbreviated study process can be conducted that would not overtax staff resources. This would be appropriate if the causes of slow growth in a particular neighborhood are generally understood, and there is no need to “reinvent the wheel.”

Monitoring of employment growth within villages and centers is less certain than household growth monitoring, largely due to limitations in specificity of data. For example, privacy concerns often restrict the release from state agencies of specific employment data for smaller areas. Since recent employment data are not available for small geographic areas of the city, it may be necessary to test different thresholds once data become available, to ensure that any special review based on employment growth rates is sufficiently focused to make the analysis meaningful.

### **Review of Villages that Deviate from Targets**

Once SPO identifies neighborhoods that approach or exceed the threshold criteria, SPO will collect additional information and use the neighborhood plan to offer some remedial options to neighborhood groups. The additional review by SPO will have different emphases for fast-growing and slow-growing neighborhoods, and would be tailored to the specifics of the neighborhood, rather than follow a rigid format. For all studied neighborhoods, the review would qualitatively evaluate the character of the village/center (mature, pedestrian-friendly urban environment vs. evolving, less developed and less defined village locations), and recent development patterns. Part of the review will be a consideration of the neighborhood plan’s suggestions for dealing with or attracting growth. Typical examples of successful plan implementation might include such items as

infrastructure and urban design improvements, increased availability of retail services, and increased availability of suitable, convenient community facilities.

In fast-growing neighborhoods, the City and community's study should study the location and nature of the growth (for example, housing affordability, ownership vs. rental, special population housing, densities, relative rates of household vs. commercial growth, etc.). Also, the City should identify specific growth-related impacts, as well as the development capacity for further growth.

In slow-growing neighborhoods, the City and community's study should carefully look at existing conditions in the area related to vacancy rates, household income, rents, business activity, crime rates, transit access, physical appearance and other conditions that could affect development levels. The City and community may want to interview developers and others to determine what factors have kept growth from occurring in the area.

SPO will also compare the neighborhood's growth outlook to citywide and regional growth patterns, for the sake of providing context and perspective. Such a comparison could indicate that a given neighborhood is growing exceptionally quickly, even during a period of high regional growth. Conversely, if the regional economic and growth climate is slow-growing, a slower-growing neighborhood is understandable and might be of less concern. An evaluation might also compare growth in a village or center to nearby areas outside village boundaries, to see if more growth is occurring within villages, as intended by the Comprehensive Plan.

The qualitative and quantitative evaluations will provide a framework of information that SPO and interested citizens can use to determine courses of action to address identified issues and offset impacts. Desirable actions are likely to depend on individual circumstances in each neighborhood, but for fast-growing neighborhoods could include:

- reviewing the existing plan for the neighborhood for guidance as to the types of actions suggested for accommodating growth
- changes to the transportation system, including sidewalk paving;
- other infrastructure improvements;
- City capital investments in community facilities that could provide services to the growing population;
- neighborhood-specific design guidelines that help new development promote the desired character for the neighborhood;
- metering of growth; or
- rezones or changes in development standards.

For slow-growing neighborhoods, recommendations to stimulate additional development could include:

- zoning changes to categories that have proven more successful in other areas within the city;

- tax incentives, such as the tax abatement for multifamily construction;
- Police Department activity that reduces the actual or perceived level of crime;
- community activities that promote the unique features of the area;
- City capital investments that provide growth-inducing amenities.

## **Summary of Citizen Comments from December 10, 1998 Meeting**

Citizens that attended the December 10th meeting were provided beforehand with a draft of this issue paper and an outline of a prospective monitoring and decision process involving both the City and interested neighborhood residents. The citizens generally agreed with the proposed monitoring process, but stressed: accessibility to development information to facilitate citizen tracking of growth; participation in decisions about growth targets; tracking impacts of growth and the City's responses (e.g., provision of facility and service improvements); the need to consider the possibility of stronger measures such as rezones and growth metering to deal with rapid growth in urban villages and centers; and the need for a truly collaborative effort between the City and the public.

### *Monitoring and Data*

The ability of citizens to access development information in order to track and confirm growth "in the field" was a primary topic of discussion. Desired information includes commercial square feet and employment growth as well as number and types of dwelling units in a given neighborhood--both for urban villages/centers and plan areas outside urban villages. Even more detailed information is desired by the citizens, such as number of bedrooms in new units, and amount of parking. The citizens recommended that the City continue to refine the data gathering system and the manner in which it would be available to citizens for their use. SPO staff noted the constraints in obtaining data from City databases and other sources, but agreed that an easier and more effective data gathering system is desirable and that citizens should have access to data to assist in monitoring and verification of growth. SPO agreed to further examine its processes in gathering and distributing information, particularly as it relates to this monitoring process.

### *Thresholds*

Citizen comments did not indicate significant concern with the proposed threshold criteria. The most direct comments on this topic supported the identified thresholds, five-year rolling totals, and the evaluation of growth in percentage terms rather than absolute numbers. The thresholds were recommended to be used as "guidelines" rather than "brightlines" such that villages with growth approaching but not meeting threshold criteria would not be ignored. SPO staff agreed with this recommendation.

The discussion yielded two possible alternative growth evaluation methods. One comment recommended that 8 to 10-year growth totals also be looked at as a way to capture a full "economic cycle." Another comment suggested ranking villages in terms of percent growth, with the most rapidly growing villages receiving quicker attention. The 8 to 10-year growth pattern could be examined as a supplemental measure of growth conditions. The concept of ranking villages has merit because it would help prioritize the fastest and slowest-growing villages and is flexible in that villages could be ranked according to more than one criterion.

### *Review Process*

Citizens recommended that the proposed monitoring process should be undertaken as a truly collaborative effort between the City and interested citizens. Enhanced availability of information, the ability to meet with SPO staff, and cooperative efforts to get approval for and implement identified solutions would support this concept. SPO staff agreed with this recommendation.

The citizens voiced strong concerns that the proposed process should not be used as a convenient way to justify arbitrary changes in growth targets for the neighborhoods, and that neighborhood groups should provide consent prior to any change in a growth target. SPO staff indicated that changes in growth targets are not the intent of the monitoring process.

The citizens suggested that neighborhood-specific reviews should be more than strictly quantitative; the City should review the character and constituents of new development in order to determine the overall implications for the neighborhood. SPO staff agreed that a neighborhood-specific review should consider a number of quantitative and qualitative factors to provide an accurate interpretation of growth trends and land use conditions.

### *Potential Adjustments*

The citizens requested that rezones and changes in development standards be added to the list of possible responses to rapid growth. Interest was also expressed in the concept of growth metering, referring to possible annual limits on the amount of development. It was recognized that metering would require additional modifications to City land use regulations. SPO staff agreed that these are possible responses to rapid growth.

The citizens generally agreed that the monitoring process should track and report on measures of impacts to neighborhoods, and indicate the City's provision of resources or improvements responding to growth. For example, traffic volumes and bus ridership are two possible measures of growth impacts in a given area, and additional street improvements and more bus service are possible responses to growth. The suggested responses also included provision of public facilities (libraries, community centers), open space and other infrastructure or public service improvements. This tracking concept would help assure that growth does not outstrip the capacity of public facilities. SPO staff agreed with this concept; data limitations will restrict the ability to report on some of the specific suggestions.